

BURT (S. S.)

A FLYING TRIP

BY RAIL

FROM

NEW YORK TO CALIFORNIA.

BY

STEPHEN SMITH BURT, A.M., M.D.

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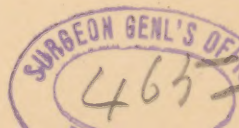


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To be smothered in dust or buried in snow is a possible alternative presented to the transcontinental winter traveller. Whoever selects a Southern route to avoid the snow of the North will probably regret that he did not choose a Northern route to escape the dust of the South; but whoever has the misfortune to get stalled in a snowdrift will have little reason to congratulate himself upon the wisdom of his selection. Still, snow does not invariably block the way in the North, and, in moderation, it adds to the comfort of railroad travel, while the dust of the South is unavoidable and without extenuation. There are several things requiring the careful consideration of an invalid who contemplates this long and at best somewhat tedious journey. Change of scene and air are commonly beneficial, provided a person is in a suitable condition to make the change; and this is a question to be determined by a competent medical adviser in each individual instance. It is not always the fault of the physician that patients decide to leave their comfortable homes in a vain search for what



they are past finding. There is no especial virtue in any climate beyond the fresh air and sunlight, and wherever the most time can be spent out of doors lies the best chance for recovery that Nature affords. In crossing the mountains a person with a weak heart should choose the road that follows the lowest grade, as it is possible for sudden death to overtake such cases on very high elevations. At this season nearly the same amount of clothing is needed in California that is required in New York, except perhaps the topcoat, which, however, must never be out of reach; and, moreover, along the Pacific coast garments of about the same weight are worn all the year. The railway eating houses of this country, particularly in the West, are many of them very poor, though, to be sure, some are not quite so bad as others; and the dining car service west of Chicago—when there is one—to say the least is indifferent. Hence the traveller, and especially an invalid, will do well to make adequate provision against such contingencies.

Down through the Carolinas, the sight of many unpicked cotton fields gave rise to premature reflections upon the apparent shiftlessness of the Southern people, until it was learned in New Orleans that, such is the overproduction this year, a million bales of cotton, mostly unsold, overrun the warehouses and burden the wharves of that city, causing much distress both to the planters and money lenders. Here and there, however, cotton mills are visible, and around

them signs of thrift such as surely follow in the wake of manufacture; neat little painted homes, with shingled roofs, in place of the possibly more romantic but certainly less comfortable log cabins of the agricultural districts. Those cotton factories at the source of the raw material, together with every advantage of modern labor-saving machinery, and yet not far from an extensive market for their finished products, have taken an economic stand destined sooner or later to drive all distant competitors from this industry.

Not until we reached the Gulf of Mexico did the temperature suggest a summer elevation—and the previous night there was a decided frost—but as we neared New Orleans the balmy air laden with the scent of the orange blossom, the bright blue sky, the dark green foliage draped in the funereal Spanish moss, and the beautiful flowers smiling in the tropical fragrance, told of a land of almost perpetual warmth. New Year's day in the picturesque city of New Orleans was like a day in June in New York. The overhanging balconies and stucco walls of the Spanish-American architecture, in the older parts of the town, including the irregularity of structure, and the strange burial grounds, lend an exceedingly foreign aspect to the place. Still, notwithstanding this, no one is more at home than a New Yorker in the streets of New Orleans, for no place can be dirtier than New York but New Orleans. Owing to the water in the subsoil, burials have to be made in tombs above ground; and, for the

same reason, all drainage is superficial and therefore insufficient. Cremation should take the place of this dangerous custom of surface burial, and the streets should be adequately cleaned and drained, or death will again hold high carnival in the form of yellow fever among this joyous, attractive, pleasure-loving people.

In crossing Texas, one realizes for the first time the vastness of this State, which is more than eight hundred miles in width. At San Antonio, in what is called the black prairie region of Western Texas, I was impressed, as never before, by the important position a good flow of pure water holds in the economy of such an arid country. Scattered about the extensive and picturesque grounds of Mr. Brackenridge are many beautiful springs, perpetual fountains of utility and pleasure, that well in crystal purity from rocky depths beneath, surrounded by flowers and ferns and trees, and whose water, now rushing in rippled haste through narrow pebbly channels, then flowing in deep serenity over broad tinted carpets of exquisitely woven algæ, forms in its gathered volume the supply of the city reservoir and the source of the San Antonio River. Why should things of such vital interest to the community ever be left to the uncertain disposition of any individual, however public-spirited? Here at San Antonio took place that memorable massacre of the Texans by the sanguinary Mexicans under Santa Anna; and one of the victims of this bloody encounter was James Bowie, the inventor

of the famous bowie knife. Upon the eastern border of the Alamo Plaza are the remains of the church of the Mission of the Alamo in which these martyrs perished. In peace a sanctuary, in war a fortress, the Alamo stands a monument alike to the heroism of man and the cruelty of warfare, and withal, a most romantic feature in American history.

One can scarcely be expected to go deeply into the merits of the climate upon twenty-four hours' experience. Still there was time to find out what is meant by a *norther* in Texas, and also to appreciate the extreme dryness and purity of the atmosphere. It must be that a country where meat is cured simply by exposure to the air, and a carcass returns to the elements by desiccation instead of by mortification, is pretty free from pathogenic organisms.

Specimens of the various animals and reptiles of this region are exhibited in the museum of the San Pedro Park, among which scorpions, centipedes, tarantulas, and those curious little horned toads especially attracted my attention, and also a species of lizard known as the Gila monster, said to be even more noxious than the rattlesnake. It is a mistaken idea, and a very general one, that whiskey is an antidote to the venom of snake-bite. The amount of poison that happens to get into the circulation has more to do with the ultimate result than any form of medication, and, in my opinion, this holds likewise with a number of other diseases about which there is so

much short-sighted speculation regarding the action of remedies. All that the whiskey can accomplish is to fortify the patient against the depressing results of the poison; and given in excess of these requirements, it may, in its toxic effects supplement the rattlesnake. Apropos of these reptiles, many persons think the rattle a kind provision of Nature for the safety of man, but it is pretty well established that this caudal appendage was evolved to frighten the natural enemies of the snake, and thus enable him to save, when possible, his limited supply of venomous ammunition.

We finally emerged from Texas at El Paso, crossing New Mexico at night, and reached Tucson, Arizona, in the morning. While at Yuma we saw a few lithesome Indians strutting about, or gathered in silent simulation of thought, in fanciful costumes, thick mops of coarse black hair upon their otherwise uncoved heads, painted faces, narrow black circles around their treacherous eyes, and vertical streaks down from either canthus and from the corners of the mouth, which now and then was covered by a gaudy handkerchief. Three plump and frescoed maidens of the Indian tribe, aboriginal belles without a doubt, squatted upon the station platform, in stoical indifference to the admiring crowd of travellers. A noisy miner reeled his drunken way among the motley throng; and one squalid squaw of middle age, with an eye to business that rather detracted from the romance of the scene, exposed

to view her cunning little papoose, likewise decorated, for a small consideration; while, to complete the picture, a wrinkled and dried old warrior wandered about, sucking a stick of peppermint candy thrown him from a car, and offered for sale a weird little Indian fetich at a most exorbitant price. Just beyond Yuma we passed near the inland sea formed not long ago by the subterranean overflow, so to speak, of the Colorado River into the adjacent desert, which is a basin one hundred and fifty feet below sea level. The water is now fast receding. Rivers have a way of suddenly diving under ground in these torrid regions, possibly to escape complete evaporation. It was thought at one time that this change of the desert into an ocean would result also in some local climatic transformation.

Out of a cloud of acrid, smothering dust we passed from New Mexico and Arizona with a sigh of relief into Southern California. The ride from Los Angeles down along the coast to San Diego, most of the way in full view of the Pacific Ocean, the stately mountains upon one side and the sea upon the other, with groves of orange trees scattered here and there, and flocks of wildfowl everywhere, the brown hills covered with browsing sheep and the sombre meadows with grazing herds of cattle, made a pleasing transition from the dreadful desolation of the dusty, stifling desert with its lonely cacti and its dreary waste of sand. Nevertheless, a first impression of California at this season of the year is likely to

be one of disappointment. No tropical luxuriance of flowers or warmth or verdure. Brownness rules over the land supreme, and the effect is not prepossessing. But with the springtime comes a metamorphosis that warms even the most phlegmatic onlooker into enthusiastic admiration. The advent of the rainy season—which in this region means simply a time of probable rain and not the continual downpour of the tropics—is the signal for a general awakening of vegetation. Meantime, it is true, flowers are in perennial bloom under cultivation, and, likewise, many trees and shrubs retain a certain sombre greenness. For three-quarters of the year the hills and plains are dry and brown. Still, there is enchantment in the very atmosphere of Southern California. Neither very warm nor yet very cold, there is a lack of dampness in the air, relatively speaking, upon the coast that is remarkable. Up from the Colorado Desert, beyond the San Bernardino range of mountains, rises a superheated body of air, which drifts over and is cooled by the sea, to return in an undercurrent of modified moisture that is practically almost dryness before it has gone far ashore. As I was told by a chance acquaintance, more voluble in his language than discriminating, the dry warm air of the desert *temporizes* the entire climate of Southern California. The direct rays of the sun are hot, while the air is cold, during the winter months, in the shade and at night. In the summer the sea air is cool, but not raw, and at all times somewhat

stimulating. At about 11 o'clock in the morning a breeze springs up from the sea with great regularity and continues until late in the afternoon but with moderate velocity. Here, indeed, is a country with pure air, pure water and an abundance of sunlight, fulfilling the requirements of a health resort by its good hotel accommodation and interesting surroundings. There is a spring of natural mineral water at Coronado Beach, which is agreeable to the taste, and, moreover, has some marked diuretic properties. Some persons subject to asthma find decided relief in this section of the world, and also those suffering from general debility, nervous prostration, and insomnia. Invalids should endeavor to be out in the bright sunshine of the early morning and go indoors surely by 4 o'clock in the afternoon. Woollen clothing should be worn at all times, flannel blankets are needed for bed covering, and open fires are advisable in the evening. There are a variety of climates within a comparatively narrow range in Southern California, and the resident physicians must of necessity be the judges of their desirability in individual instances. It seems to me that patients with incipient phthisis should select a place some distance inland. I saw two or three victims of tuberculosis at Coronado Beach who should not have left home under any circumstances. We have several comparatively accessible places in Florida where some invalids might go with advantage. I have sent patients suffering with

affections such as asthma, bronchitis, catarrh, phthisis, and emphysema, with good results, to Florida, and several years ago I took a man with disease of the kidneys to Palatka, on the St. John's River, where he made marked improvement.

San Diego Bay is certainly a beautiful little harbor, radiant with sunshine, and the Hotel Del Coronado commands a superb view of the mountains upon one side and the ocean upon the other. Mexico, too, is within sight. Riding at anchor in the bay were the cruisers *San Francisco* and *Charleston*, awaiting the turn of events in South America. And through the narrow channel along towards Point Loma a Chinese junk, with lateen sail, was making its lazy way to deep sea-fishing. The Chilian ship *Itata* landed her abducted pilot on the shores of this inlet. Hereabouts are all kinds of out-door sports, including good hunting for those who still find pleasure in this outcropping instinct of our barbaric ancestors. It was in this country that Helen Jackson found the material for her soul-stirring book, "Ramona," which enlists our sympathies, through the story of Majella and Alessandro, for the foul injustice done the peaceful Mission Indians. "Yes," said my friend of previous mention, referring to this and to the ruins of San Juan Capistrano, a mission which came to its end by an earthquake with a terrible tragedy, "this part of the country is full of *histrionic* interest!" But however much man has

done to rivet the attention upon this neighborhood, it seems to me that Nature was more lavish further north with her favors.

I never shall forget a delightful journey, made a few years ago, upon horseback across the Willamete Valley in Oregon, and up into the Cascade Mountains through the cañon of the Lower Santiam River to the very summit of that range. The sublimity of such scenery defies description. While at Coronado Beach I strolled into the museum, which is an interesting feature of the place, and there took the opportunity to verify a statement of Huxley's regarding the so-called quadrumana. A skeleton of one of these primates plainly demonstrated that the hind limb terminates, as shown by the shape and size of the bones, in a foot and not a hand. My meeting with Dr Easterday, of Albuquerque, New Mexico, at San Diego, shows how widely the former students of our Post-Graduate Medical School are scattered about the country. The oranges of California, or those I chanced upon, did not seem equal to the Indian River fruit of Florida; the fresh olives, however, were a gastronomic revelation, and I tasted some delicious figs; but the quail, which are plentiful, are tough and without flavor, and the oysters are small as well as unpalatable.

Our northward ride over the Golden State across the eastern trend of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, along the great cañon by moonlight, through the Loop and thence to San Francisco,

was most interesting. The *Loop* is a bit of clever engineering. In order to obviate a very steep grade, the road describes a circle back around the brow of a hill, and, returning, crosses its own track by means of a tunnel. Through Northern California we passed over miles of arable country. Ploughing is a novel sight in January, and with six horses to a plough at any season. During the winter the Yosemite Valley is inaccessible, and therefore I missed the pleasure of a visit to that wonderland. What must have been the reflections of a fellow traveller who now reached San Francisco in as many days as he was months in making his first journey across the continent? Then a prairie schooner and a team of mules, now a tireless iron horse and a Pullman palace car—certainly the inconveniences of the present sink into insignificance compared to the dangers and hardships of the past.

Here in Northern California is found the same delightful atmosphere in winter that pervades the coast of Southern California. There are flowers in profusion under cultivation, and also considerable verdure. San Francisco is a city of many hills, with a bay of surpassing beauty and a far-famed Golden Gate. To stand upon the rugged cliffs and look out across Seal Rocks on that vast expanse of ocean in the splendor of a setting sun, is alone enough to feel this journey not in vain.

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